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SUBJECT: AS McMURRAY'S VISIT TO NEW ZEALAND HIGHLIGHTS
SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION

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(SBU) Summary: OES Assistant Secretary Claudia A. McMurray's January 17-19 meetings with New Zealand officials advanced US-NZ bilateral cooperation on a broad range of scientific and environmental issues, including climate change, sustainable fisheries, and whale conservation. On January 16, A/S McMurray renewed a cooperative arrangement between the U.S. Geological Survey and New Zealand's National Institute of Water and Atmosphere (NIWA), drawing favorable local press coverage. Her talks with Energy Minister David Parker and other GNZ officials revealed that New Zealand and the United States face similar challenges in balancing energy, economic, and environmental demands, suggesting these could be useful areas to explore under our bilateral Climate Change Partnership. A/S McMurray also encouraged New Zealand to join the Coalition Against Wildlife Trafficking (CAWT).
End summary.

¶2. (U) En route to Antarctica to commemorate 50 years of U.S. and New Zealand cooperation on the Southern continent, A/S McMurray met in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch with Minister for Conservation Chris Carter, Minister for Climate Change David Parker, and officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), Ministry of Fisheries (MFish), Ministry for the Environment (MfE), the Department of Conservation (DOC) and the National Institute of Water and Atmosphere (NIWA).

¶3. (U) In Wellington on January 16, A/S McMurray was briefed by officials at the at the National Institute of Water and Atmosphere (NIWA) on the many areas of U.S.-New Zealand cooperation, including atmosphere and climate science, energy, natural hazards, fresh water, aquatic biodiversity and security, fisheries and aquaculture, and biotechnology. The NIWA officials emphasized the value they derive from cooperative climate change science work with US officials, including measuring greenhouse gas levels in Pacific ocean and Antarctic ice core samples. The briefing was followed by a signing ceremony at which A/S McMurray joined Acting Chief Executive of NIWA Bryce Cooper to renew a cooperative arrangement between the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and NIWA. The very positive New Zealand media reporting on the event highlighted A/S McMurray's observation that the United States views scientific and economic cooperation as the backbone of the US-New Zealand bilateral relationship.

¶4. (SBU) During a discussion with MFAT and other GNZ officials on New Zealand's domestic fisheries management program, the Kiwis told A/S McMurray about New Zealand's problems with abalone poaching. While New Zealand's domestic abalone sector is licensed to catch about 1050 tons of

abalone meat per year, an estimated additional 800 to 900 tons of abalone is poached from New Zealand waters. According to the NZ Ministry of Fisheries, the poaching is mostly run by the same Asian gangs that traffick drugs in the region. While the GNZ takes aggressive steps to reduce poached abalone bound for Hong Kong and China, much still gets through and the Government has been forced to reduce the amount that can be caught legally in order to sustain domestic abalone stocks. A/S McMurray suggested New Zealand help address the poaching problem by joining the first ministerial of the Coalition against Wildlife Trafficking, to be held in Nairobi in early February. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) Deputy Secretary Caroline Forsyth, who led the discussions for the Kiwi side, said GNZ officials would try to attend the ministerial and would look into the possibility of New Zealand's signing up for the Coalition. (FYI: Forsyth has since told the Embassy that although New Zealand will unfortunately not be able to attend the Nairobi meeting, the GNZ is still considering whether to join the Coalition. End FYI.)

¶15. (SBU) In a separate meeting that day, Dave Brash, General Manager, Ministry for the Environment, told A/S McMurray that formulating an effective New Zealand climate change policy is especially challenging because the country's agriculturally-based economy is both sensitive to the effects of climate change and the major contributor to New Zealand's emissions. Approximately 50 percent of emissions come from the country's farms, mostly from ruminant animals, their waste, and nitrogen fertilizers. In July 2006, the GNZ put forward an economy-wide climate change strategy that aims to coordinate the sometimes competitive policy interests of the energy, transport and land management sectors (ref B). During a January 17 lunch, Energy Minister Parker, who is also the country's Minister for Climate Change, provided A/S McMurray with one example of how it is difficult in practice for GNZ to find the balance between these competing priorities. Citing interest by ExxonMobil and Chevron in exploring hydrocarbon development off New Zealand's southern coast, Parker admitted that this would be at odds with the Government's stated preference for renewable resources. But, he added, New Zealand has to consider all options because it will face increasing energy supply and security challenges as the country's North Island natural gas reserves wane.

¶16. (SBU) A/S McMurray also discussed whale conservation during a number of her meetings with GNZ officials. Referring to the upcoming May meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in Anchorage, Alaska, A/S McMurray noted the likely challenge to the aboriginal bowhead quota, particularly given that Japan will be Vice Chair. New Zealand expressed the view that like-minded countries should stay away from a Japanese reform meeting planned for February, expressing concern over Japanese attempts to "knock out" conservation from the IWC. A/S McMurray welcomed New Zealand's offer to be helpful in Alaska.

Keegan